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ZEN MASTER RILKE

The Gatha of the Idiot Who Plays Ball



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**Zen Master Rilke: The Gatha
of the Idiot. Who Plays Ball**

«Издательские решения»

Tsylyov V.

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«The Song of the Idiot» is one of the paradoxical poems by R. M. Rilke (1875—1926), the greatest modernist poet of the 20th century. After reading this funny book, the reader will know what this poem has in common with Zen's sense of nonsense. As the story goes, when the famous Master Tho Idi heard this «Song», he exclaimed, «If I am asked about the Sense of all sense, I will bounce like a fool's ball». The book is illustrated with drawings by Zen artists of the Edo period.

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Preface

This book is my first work in the *Buddha-Rilke* series. The fantasy story it contains is small in volume, not overloaded with great meaning, and “brewed” like a single cup of unpretentiously light tea, so that it is not even read, but rather “digested” leisurely – in two or three carefree sips. And yet I hope that the aftertaste of such a “frivolous” book will remain with the reader for a long time.

The semantic centre of the book is “The Song of the Idiot”, one of Rilke’s paradoxical poems. I have to admit right away that my translation of this poem looks like a very free and clumsy interpretation of the original text. However, despite this shortcoming, I sincerely hope that I have managed to keep the spirit of Rilke’s Idiot alive and to integrate this character harmoniously into the story of the book.

To give the book a more expressive look, I decided to dilute the text with funny pictures – amusing Zen drawings by the acknowledged masters of this genre: Hakuin Ekaku (1686—1769), Sengai Gibon (1750—1837) and his friend Saito Shuho (c. 1768—1859).

I would like to point out that all images used in my illustrations are in the public domain.

Readers new to Zen vocabulary, as well as some textbook Zen characters and plots, will benefit from a small reference section at the end of the book. But first it is worth knowing what *Gatha* is. As Master Tho Idi once joked, “Gatha is an irrefutable demonstration of Emptiness in the mind of the idiot.”



Zen Poet Rilke

The Gatha of the Idiot Who Plays Ball

When asked about the sense of Tao, I will flutter like a Zhuang Tzu butterfly; when asked about the sense of Zen, I will open like a Basho flower; when asked about the sense of all sense, I will bounce like an idiot's ball.

– **Master Tho Idi***

The only result of Chan meditation, if the practice is serious, is idiocy.

– **Leon Wieger****

You're an idiot, I'm an idiot and so is God.

– **George Gurdjieff*****

* See the reference section of the book.

** Leon Wieger (1856 -1933) was a French Jesuit missionary, medical doctor, theologian and sinologist.

*** George Ivanovich Gurdjieff (1866 – 1949) was a philosopher, mystic, spiritual teacher, and composer.

Instead of Prologue

In the year 2022, in one of China's most remote provinces, excavations at the ruins of an ancient Chan monastery have uncovered a strange script artefact. The archaeologists' attention was drawn to a well-preserved manuscript which, according to a number of researchers, can be confidently dated to the eighth century. This documentary monument, written on a rare type of paper, contained the codex of a hitherto unknown school of sudden enlightenment called the Bouncing Ball School. Researchers have found many curiosities in this unique document. We know nothing about a mentor of this school, a master called Tho Idi, whose name does not appear in any historiographical source. Nor do we know how he came to be inspired by the texts of the great Japanese poet Basho (see epigraph), who lived and worked many years later – in the seventeenth (!) century. To top it all, the ancient oriental manuscript contains a poem by the famous European modernist poet R. M. Rilke, first published in 1906 (!).

The reader is presented with two key chapters of the Codex which convey the essence of Master Tho Idi's teachings.



Hakuin Ekaku, *Self-Portrait*

From the Codex of the Bouncing Ball School
Sections on Sudden Enlightenment.
Recordings of Master Tho Idi's Lectures

● Gatha to Pass on the Teachings

●

Addressing the assembly,

Mentor said, “Seekers of the Way! Those who have heard of the legendary *Platform Sutra* know that in a once glorious time, when the Buddha’s Teachings flourished in the Celestial Empire and the spirit of absurdity dwelt wherever it pleased, it was possible to gain the highest honours and even become the next Patriarch by composing an unsurpassed Gatha of Consciousness.

“But few people know that such a Gatha can only be the work of a very special person ...”

At this moment, the Mentor deliberately paused.



Hakuin Ekaku, *Daruma*

•

Everyone held

their breath.



Saito Shuho, *Sengai's Nirvana* (detail)

•

“Who is it,

do you think?” the Mentor addressed the assembled.

“The wisest of all the philosophers!” replied a philosopher.

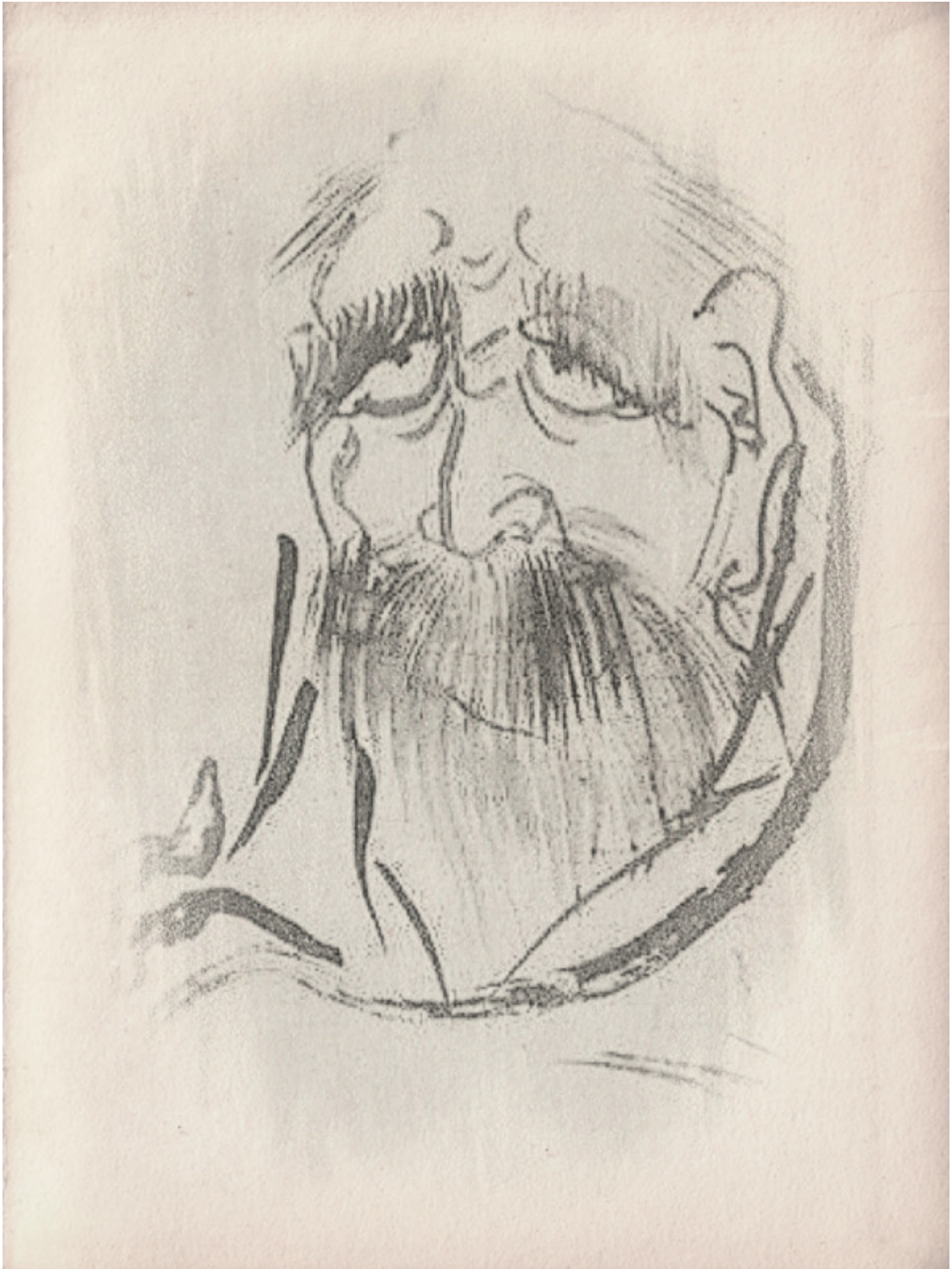
“The most skilful of all alchemists!” replied an alchemist.
“The most inspired of all poets!” replied a poet.



Sengai Gibon, *Nanquan Cuts the Cat in Two*, detail “Two Monks”

•

“Oh, how lightly
you all think,” remarked the Mentor.



Sengai Gibon, *Daruma*

“Are there other worthy men

whom we have forgotten to mention?” wondered the disciples.



Sengai Gibon, *Nanquan Cuts the Cat in Two*, detail “Two Monks”

“There is certainly one

And he’s the simplest of all!”

“The simplest of all?” asked the disciples.



Saito Shuho, *Sengai's Nirvana* (detail)



“Yes, he is the one who
playfully turns the Lotus of the Law.”
“And who is he? Who is he?” the disciples asked each other impatiently.

Конец ознакомительного фрагмента.

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